

Probation, parole agents renew vow

By: [DARLENE DENSTORFF](#), The Advocate, July 24, 2008

DONALDSONVILLE — While the ceremony may have been brief, the agents and specialists working at the Donaldsonville District Office of Probation and Parole described it as meaningful.

One by one, more than dozen of the office's 28 employees reaffirmed their oath with the Department of Public Safety and Corrections in front of retired Judge A.J. Kling, 23rd Judicial District Court.

Tony Simon, district administrator for the office, said reaffirming the oath "reminds us of our mission to serve the community."

The ceremony was held during Probation, Parole and community Supervision Week — a national observance to honor the men and women who work "each and every day on the front lines with probationers and parolees to hold them accountable for the crimes they have committed against our families, our friends, our neighbors and our communities," according to a news release issued about the week.



23rd Judicial District Ad hoc Judge A.J. Kling, right, reaffirms the oaths of employees of the Donaldsonville District Probation and Parole on July 17 in observance of Probation, Parole and Community Supervision Week. Taking part in the ceremony are, from left, Shanta Mack, Chermise Henderson, Shanita Smith, Sean Guy, James Moore, Preston Bennett, Kling, and Tony Simon.

The Donaldsonville office opened in 2005 to handle the growing number of offenders on the case roles, Simon said.

As of July 17, the office had 2,100 probationers and parolees from Ascension, Assumption, St. James and St. John the Baptist parishes under their supervision.

Agent Preston Bennett of Prairieville, who has been on the job for seven months, said he was drawn to the job because it combines social work with law enforcement.

“We get to wear all kinds of hats,” he said.

Bennett said he performs investigations for the parole board and for clemency requests from the Governor’s Office. He also does pre-sentence investigations for judges and works with victims to keep them up to date on hearings related to their cases.

After spending 15 years as a chef, Bennett said it is gratifying to know “you’re doing meaningful work.”

“I couldn’t picture myself doing anything else,” Bennett said. “This was an important day for me and the others.”

Shea Cochran of Maurepas handles high profile and violent offenders in her job as a specialist. After seven years on the job, Cochran said she always wanted a career in law enforcement.

She said her role is to provide safety for the community and help the offenders to become productive members of society.

Many of Cochran’s 140 cases involve convicted sex offenders, including some who will be on parole for the rest of their lives.

Cochran and Bennett both come from families with strong ties to the criminal justice system. Cochran’s stepfather and Bennett’s father served as judges. Simon described the work his employees do as “invisible in the community.”

“These professionals provide protection to our communities,” Simon said. “They are often silent partners, yet they spend more time with offenders than many other agencies. They make a truly lasting impression on their communities and are making their mark for public safety.”

Simon’s staff includes three agent supervisors, a support staff supervisor, 18 agents, three support staff and a probation and parole assistant.